Community and Communication among Instructors of Educational Psychology

By Kelvin Seifert, University of Manitoba

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How can we strengthen and improve the teaching of introductory educational psychology? Both explicitly and implicitly, the members of this panel have suggested several ways. Most have a familiar ring: we can do more research, or visit with each other in person more often, or correspond with each other more often. But there are also obstacles to each strategy that have to be dealt with before we can expect improvements actually to occur. As I will try to show, the obstacles all have to do with lack of communication among educational psychology instructors (EPIs), and consequent limits on collegial support among this group of teacher educators.

One path to improvement is simply to do research about the teaching and learning of educational psychology. This is the strategy represented clearly by the journal *Teaching Educational Psychology* (http://www.teachingeducpsych.org): as its name implies, it provides an incentive to do research in this field and to communicate it to fellow EPIs. A second recommendation for improvement is for EPIs to meet in person at conferences or other gatherings to offer support, challenges, and new ideas; the idea is to learn from each other from these encounters, and thus improve our work back home. This strategy is at the heart of conferences like AERA, and of the sessions within AERA sponsored by the Teaching Educational Psychology SIG in particular. A third recommendation—a newer one—is to share ideas and resources online, not only through email and websites, but also using the newer, socially oriented software applications such as blogs and wikis. This strategy is the implied purpose of listserv discussion groups such as the "forum" list of the TEP SIG (http://listserv.aera.net). It is also the central purpose of a new wiki-based website sponsored by the TEP SIG called *teachingedpsych* (http://teachingedpsych.wikispaces.com). As I will explain below, the first two recommendations (research and conferences) are helpful, but not as helpful as they seem at first. The third recommendation (online resources) is probably helpful, but has not yet been explored by EPIs fully.

The Practicalities of "Doing More Research"

Each strategy has advantages, but realizing the advantages is hampered in every case by a general lack of community and communication among EPIs. Take, for example, the advice to "do more research." You have probably already heard this idea—perhaps felt it nagging when you are up to your

ears in more immediate teaching responsibilities. The idea is that by creating more and better "real" knowledge about teaching educational psychology, we turn ourselves into experts about the teaching of this subject. Expertise in turn hopefully leads to credibility: more people are likely to believe that we have something to offer teacher education—because presumably we really do. So "doing more research" should simultaneously help us teach better and stimulate respect from colleagues and the public. Public respect helps to garner support for further research, and thus leads to further gains in expert skill and public respect. It is a positive, enviable cycle once it gets going—nice work if you can get it.

The catch, of course, is getting the cycle going. There are notable exceptions, but most EPIs experience serious limits on the time that they can actually devote to research, as well as limits on access to funding for it. This is true even for those who do get grants and clear a portion of time for research. There is always more research that could be done, and always constraints on the time and money available. The advice to "do more research" might therefore be phrased better as "Do more research *and* less of something else." Research usually has to be fitted among other priorities, including teaching educational psychology, teaching other courses, providing professional service, and (let us not forget!) personal and family life.

Under these conditions we naturally choose research projects carefully, knowing that we will not have time to study everything. When time and money are limited, a research problem will have to pay off relatively soon, either in recognition or in financial support, regardless of its indirect or long-term benefits to the field. As a potential research topic, studying the teaching of educational psychology simply may not make the cut. In addition, studying the *teaching* of educational psychology may resemble action research a bit too much for its own good. A particular funding authority may have an allergy to action research, so to speak; it may regard this genre as not quite "real" research. For some, proposals to study the *teaching* educational psychology may seem necessarily too complicated or too prone to investigator bias. Given these uncertainties, EPIs may question whether the teaching of educational psychology can ever be developed into a viable program of research, even in principle. If EPIs have time for research at all, therefore, they may use it to address other interests. In any event, doing research about teaching educational psychology is neither automatic nor easy; there just may not be enough support for it in some of the worlds inhabited by EPIs.

The Practicalities of Attending Conferences

If doing more research about teaching educational psychology is problematic, then what about attending conferences and meetings? Can these strengthen the teaching of educational psychology? Certainly conference meetings potentially encourage collegiality and foster the sharing of ideas, projects, and resources. Face-to-face conversations—so plentiful at meetings like AERA—provide instant two-way communication: we hear about others' work, tell about our own, and hopefully develop new ideas about teaching educational psychology. Conversations allow a degree of spontaneous sharing regardless of the state of preparation of our work (or lack thereof). Over coffee or a meal—and sometimes even during an official session!—we can describe a research initiative even if it has been only partially rigorous or successful. We can even talk about non-research matters like teaching, job hunting, or family life. From all this activity we can grow professionally. We can (hopefully) learn to teach educational psychology better in particular. These are obviously very positive outcomes.

But as some have experienced, there can be obstacles to community and communication at conferences. One is the obvious cost of travel in time, interruption of normal activities, and money. Conferences take us away from normal work and family responsibilities—admittedly sometimes a good thing, but often not. It also costs money, and lately the amounts required have risen rapidly. The financial troubles of educational institutions translate into leaner, shrinking support for faculty travel, and sometimes into elimination of support altogether. A common result is that many attendees—including EPIs—subsidize the cost of attendance out of their own pockets. A few even pay it all. This state of affairs makes EPIs think carefully about where to spend scarce professional travel dollars. It makes them travel less, and creates nagging guilt about not being able to travel more. For instructors of educational psychology, community and communication suffer accordingly.

If and when we do arrive at a conference, there are additional challenges. A conference as large as AERA may be so overwhelming that we may wonder where to begin locating suitable colleagues and conversation partners. The problem is especially acute for those who are least well connected to begin with: graduate students, newly hired assistant professors, and faculty who are the sole representatives of their field in their home department. Where in the huge, three-ring circus of AERA are such people to turn for support, stimulus, and understanding? Simply befriending participants at random can sometimes be a

helpful start. But talking to a random person can also feel like a chance encounter on a city street: you can't be sure who the person is, what their own purposes are, whether there is future to the relationship, and sometimes even whether you are really communicating or are just talking *past* each other. Random contacts can be good, but they can also be frustrating, pointless, even lonely. If the latter happens very much, community obviously suffers, or more precisely it does not develop in the first place.

Some communication problems are alleviated by choosing more specialized conferences with smaller attendance. Then you are more likely to see the same faces more than once during the conference and to meet people whose interests can be better predicted. At a small conference it is reasonable to expect individual participants' interests to correspond somewhat to the theme of the conference. Rapport with fellow attendees can develop more fully as a consequence—a desirable outcome. But there are still provisos. One is that you yourself have to actually care about the specialized theme of the conference, and be actively involved in the theme somehow. Otherwise the conference will feel like a waste of time. If the conference is entirely about "teaching educational psychology," for example, you have to actually care about this activity in particular, be teaching the subject to a significant extent, and possibly have or be planning a research project about it—in spite of the aforementioned challenges of "doing research" about this topic. All in all a small conference feel a bit like living in a small town: it is a wonderful experience as long as it is the *right* small town for you.

Advantages of Online Communities

Besides doing research and attending conferences, there is a third strategy. EPIs can learn from and share ideas or materials *online*, using the social networking tools of the Internet. For most instructors, the most familiar tool is probably simple email: an electronic message or letter to a colleague, with or without attached materials. Another familiar tool is the website: a set of "pages" that display materials and text that someone has provided for public use. Email and web pages can and have supported all sorts of educational activities, including the teaching of educational psychology. A little less familiar may be blogs and wikis. The first of these—blogs—are essentially online diaries or logs written by a single author. Often they include links to other web pages as well as mechanisms for readers to comment on an author's thoughts. The second—wikis—are essentially websites created and edited collaboratively, usually by a group with a defined interest, but sometimes by the public at large.

Regardless of their features, Internet tools share certain qualities. They tend to be cost effective in time and/or money when compared to the alternatives of traveling to conferences and publishing research studies. Unlike face-to-face communications, some Internet tools can be used asynchronously, meaning that individuals can respond to each other when convenient, not just at the moment when both conversation partners are actually online. These qualities make participation more accessible than many alternative forms of communication, and in this sense more democratic. Even if the Internet cannot replace professional travel or publication, therefore, it can potentially enrich a community. The benefits are especially noticeable when a community is geographically dispersed, as is true for EPIs (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). But the benefits happen only if using Internet tools is consistent with the goals, needs, and skills of the group.

How well the Internet can help to develop the teaching of educational psychology therefore comes down to addressing three related questions: 1) What can the newer Internet tools actually do? 2) What are the inherent limitations of Internet tools? 2) What are the goals and needs of EPIs, both as individuals and as a community? The first question—the advantages or strengths of the Internet—has already been discussed. The second question—the limitations of the Internet—is discussed in the next several sections. The third question—what EPIs as a community really need or want—is discussed in final sections of the paper.

The Limits of the Internet for Building Community

As with the other forms of communication, there are inherent limits to the potential of the Internet. As others have already pointed out, the Internet penalizes individuals with limited or outdated computers or with limited connectivity—a significant number of people, it turns out, even in 2010. For most people, including EPIs, communication online is also less vivid or immediate than in face-to-face meetings, and in this sense it may have lower psychological impact. Combining the lower impact with the increased convenience of asynchronicity leads to an irony: authors find writing online to be so easy and cheap, but the huge volume that results means that readers find themselves ignoring a lot of it. Most college and university faculty end up deleting at least some emails without reading them, and ignore many postings on blogs and websites in order to save scarce time and attention. Yet if some of the deleted material is

useful and intelligent, and if reading it would build relationships with potential colleagues, professional community will suffer when it is ignored.

In addition to these qualities in common, there are qualities unique to each Internet-based tool individually. Email, for example, is easy to use because it is familiar, but it facilitates only one-to-one or one-to-a-few communications. Many email servers also favor transmission of text over transmission of graphics, tables, drawings, photographs, and videos. This happens because anti-spam software frequently blocks or restricts access to email attachments, very large messages, and mailings addressed to multiple recipients. There are sometimes ways around these obstacles, but not without incurring delays and annoyance. For educational psychology instructors as a community, these restrict the sharing of ideas.

Websites have different problems. In general they are accessible from most academics' and EPIs' computers, and they have the advantage of displaying material in a variety of visual and textual formats. These qualities make them better than email at displaying curriculum plans, handouts, and the like along with commentary about such materials. Websites also display material to the entire world simultaneously—at least if the world knows where to look for it and also *wants* to look at it. The problem is that maintaining websites tends to be a lot of work, and most instructors of educational psychology lack the web publishing skills as well as the time and motivation to learn them. Websites are also primarily a one-way form of communication, from website builder to website viewer. Response is possible, but tends to be limited to "old-fashioned" emails to the website manager(s), along with the aforementioned limitations of email. For EPIs, the end result is that innovative thinking (or even everyday discussion) about teaching educational psychology falls into the hands of "webmasters"—the relatively few individuals who are able and willing to devote time to creating and maintaining a website. A select few have to represent the concerns of a much larger and relatively silent group of EPIs—the ones who do not or cannot normally communicate with other EPIs about their teaching. Acquiring and maintaining broad knowledge for this purpose is obviously a challenge, and for most EPIs it may not even be fully possible.

Note that the role of webmaster strongly resembles the role of textbook author, including in particular the author of textbooks about introductory educational psychology. Like a webmaster, textbook authors are very scarce compared to the number of textbook adopters and readers. Authors also

assemble and provide materials in a manner that is primarily one-way, from author and publisher to

adopter and reader. And authors must somehow know the priorities and needs of their relatively silent,

numerous clientele, or at least guess about them wisely. These tasks are no easier for authors than for

webmasters. In both cases the tasks are facilitated by editors and other assistants using various

strategies to "keep their ears to the ground," meaning remain vigilant about what clients need and want.

For authors and their supporting editors, the vigilance includes, among others, checking competing texts,

talking with adopters, and hosting focus group discussions of potential adopters. For website managers,

the equivalent vigilance includes checking (or even quoting from) competing websites, and corresponding

by email and/or blog postings with visitors to the site. A key difference between authors and website

managers, however, is that textbook publishers routinely charge a fee for their services, via the price of a

textbook. Websites sometimes also charge fees, but less universally and often at lower rates for the

equivalent information. (Obviously, of course, there is the additional presence of second-hand and

"pirated" markets of both print and online materials. But discussing these would go beyond the scope of

this paper.)

> *Blogs and Wikis: Can Social Networking Help?*

The tendency toward one-way communication is remedied somewhat by the newer "social

networking" Internet tools, the most common of which are *blogs* and *wikis.* Blogs are essentially online

diaries that include text and sometimes also pictures or videos. Platforms for blogs are available online

freely or for a small charge from a variety of Internet blog services, and generally are quite easy to use.

Unlike conventional websites, blogs invite and facilitate public responses from readers. Typically

responses are posted immediately below an author's original posting, and are presented in chronological

order. The publicity gives more prominence to readers' ideas than usually happens simply by writing an

email to the author of a conventional website. By allowing for a type of two-way communication, and by

publicizing readers' responses more fully than either websites or email, blogs support richer forms of

communication, and can allow a sense of community to develop more fully among readers and author

than the older Internet tools. An EPI with good ideas and materials to share, for example, could in

principle publish these by creating a blog about them. He or she could simultaneously invite comment and

critique from other instructors, who would read each other's ideas publicly. Presumably everyone would

benefit: instructors would see more clearly both what they have in common and how they differ. The process would (hopefully) deepen the self-awareness of EPIs—their professional identity, if you will—as instructors of this particular field of knowledge.

A major drawback to this scenario is that members of the community thus formed would all be positioned as *respondents* to one author's initial ideas or materials. To this extent a blog is based in the traditional model of single, prime authorship that characterizes textbook and website production. With a blog, new ideas have an easier time being regarded as "new" if they come from the author of the blog. If they come from a respondent, they are more likely to be construed as a revision or critique of the author's prior ideas. A similar bias occurs, it should be noted, when textbook readers attempt to respond to textbook authors, whether they do so by email or in a published review. Because of their position as readers, non-authors' ideas are apt to be seen as criticisms or revisions rather than as original ideas. For many educational psychology instructors, such a role may be acceptable, at least in the short-term. In the long term, however, being limited to responding is likely to keep commitment to the study and teaching of educational psychology from becoming permanent.

An obvious, if cumbersome, response to the positioning bias might be for many or most instructors to develop their own blogs about teaching educational psychology, and at the same time read and post responses to every else's blogs. In theory this strategy would give individuals ways to originate ideas (via their own blogs) as well as to respond (via commenting on others' blogs). Instructors could refer to each other's ideas both in their original postings and in their responses. The result (in theory) would be rich intertextuality among educational psychology instructors, and stronger feelings of professional democracy and community.

In practice, of course, a multitude of blogs all about educational psychology is unrealistic because it would take too much work to track and contribute to more than a few blogs. Even the most dedicated instructor would find such a task overly time-consuming and therefore unsustainable. But suppose that multiple blogs could somehow be consolidated, while maintaining and respecting individual contributors' ideas and identities. In that case the idea might begin to work. Instructors could come to a single website that gave equal prominence both to their new ideas and to their responses to others' ideas. Visiting multiple blogs might become less necessary, if not unnecessary. The consolidated site would allow many

individuals to have a voice while allowing for individual types and levels of participation. Intellectual authority for such a website would be found less in one central author (as in a website or a textbook) and instead be more distributed among members of the community itself.

Can Wikis Help?

The hypothetical site just described is essentially a *wiki,* a website developed collaboratively by a designated group of interested individuals. The most prominent example of a wiki is *Wikipedia,* the online encyclopedia to which anyone is allowed to contribute (http://en.wikipedia.org). As others have pointed out, contributions to *Wikipedia* sometimes have problems, some of which are simply by-products of the sheer size of the project (Baker, 2008). But the resulting online encyclopedia also has definite strengths, and for many topics *Wikipedia* has proved essentially the equal of traditional print-based encyclopedias (Giles, 2005).

Many smaller wikis also exist to serve more specialized purposes. In general, participation in a small wiki feels less anonymous and more collegial than participation in a large one. Under good conditions even a small wiki can offer the advantages described above: one-stop posting and reading, flexible positioning of members, and encouragement of communication and community independent of geographic proximity. On the face of it, however, the social dynamics of small wikis seem likely to differ from large wikis radically. Professional observers have noted the importance of repeated, explicit recognition of and support for individuals' contributions, whether the contributions are large or small (Horn, n.d.). With a small or specialized wiki, it is argued, each contributor each contributor needs to be treated as valuable and unique—as indeed he or she probably is, since losing even one contributor represents a bigger loss to a small wiki than to a large one. Continual, explicit recognition is modeled and stimulated most effectively by the manager or administrator of the small wiki, because he or she is the person most likely to read all contributions and be able to relate contributors to each other and their contributions to the larger purposes of the wiki.

The manager of a small wiki therefore may end up in a role similar to a traditional community organizer (Hart, 2001; Alinsky, 1971). Like an organizer of a face-to-face setting, the wiki manager dialogues with as many individuals in the community as possible, honors their unique strengths and concerns, and looks for ways to relate individuals' deepest interests to those of the group. The one-on-

one dialoguing can be especially time-consuming, but it is necessary wherever members of a community

lack the time or resources to engage with each other directly. Since EPIs experience such constraints of

time and resources, a wiki-based website with a moderator would seem to hold promise for their future as

a professional community. Perhaps a wiki to support the teaching of educational psychology, in other

words, could provide EPIs with materials which they themselves deem to be important, while also

recognizing instructors' individuality and strengthening the links among them as a professional

community.

> *The Case of teachingedpsych.wikispaces.com*

Guided by these ideas, I created a website (located at (http://teachingedpsych.wikispaces.com)

intended to provide resources to support the teaching of educational psychology. To encourage

participation, the site was deliberately constructed as a wiki: all materials were publicly accessible, and

anyone—even non-instructors—could post, revise, or discuss anything at the site. To minimize work, I

encouraged materials to be submitted "as is," in the form they might be given to students or used by the

original instructor, with only minimal additional commentary as explanation. Although some of the

postings were therefore a bit rough around the edges, they were nonetheless comprehensible and useful

for the instructional purposes for which they were intended. Materials were initially organized into the 18

major categories (listed in Table 1), such as instructors' course syllabi, descriptions of specific class

activities, and recommendations of specific articles and books useful in teaching educational psychology.

The 18 categories were based initially on my own experience as an instructor of educational psychology,

but were revised significantly from comments and suggestions solicited from the membership of the

Special Interest Group on Teaching Educational Psychology (TEP SIG) of the American Educational

Research Association. In general materials were *not* tied to any particular theory, pedagogical approach,

or choice of textbook. Instead they are eclectic, and in this way the site differed from similar ones

sponsored by major textbook publishers that support (and depend on) adopting a particular commercial

textbook about educational psychology.

Since its founding, *teachingedpsych* has experienced a respectable degree of success. Table 2

summarizes the evidence for this assessment, based on statistics collected both by Google Analytics

(http://www.google.com/analytics) and by the wiki's sponsoring server, Wikispaces

(http://www.wikispaces.com). As of January, 2010, *teachingedpsych* had over 400 entries, located on 33 major pages, and entries have been edited a total of 438 times. Collectively these have been viewed over 10,000 times, by a total of about 400 unique visitors per month. The most commonly viewed entries are class activities (1165 views, or 10% of the total), followed by course assignments (817 views, or 8%). Excluding the home page, over half of the remaining views have been directed to just five pages: in rank order, they are class activities, course, assignments, multimedia, course syllabi, and articles and readings. (As an aside, I have also received numerous emails as manager of the site, complimenting or thanking me for the site. These may or may not be meaningful indicators of success, and in any case I kept no tally of their number or details.) The number of views and visitors is not large by Internet standards, but they are respectable given that the site has a target that is very specialized: instructors of introductory educational psychology. For this specialized context, *teachingedpsych* can claim success.

A more important question than the number of page views is whether the website actually encourages community among instructors of educational psychology. Without explicit comment from site visitors, it is hard to be certain of the answer, but there are clues from the website statistics. Like most social networking websites, most of the 400 monthly visitors to *teachingedpsych* appear to be "lurkers," or visitors who do not make their presence known publicly—i.e. they visit the site, but do not contribute, revise existing material, or post questions or comments. Presumably (and hopefully), they sometimes do find and download useful materials, but there is no way to know how much this happens, and in general their reactions are impossible to gauge precisely. In contrast to the "lurkers," only six individuals (counting myself) have actually contributed to the site as of January, 2010. Four of these people contributed to the site only once; the fifth person contributed and/or edited material 69 times, or about 16% of the total activity at the site. The remaining 82% of the material was contributed and revised by me (Kelvin Seifert), the site's founder and manager. The six non-lurking individuals (myself plus five others) represent about 1-2% of the unique visitors to the site. Presumably the six did so because they feel a greater than usual commitment to teaching educational psychology and to sharing resources among educational psychology instructors. Among the silent remainder, some may have felt a similar level of commitment; perhaps they lacked the time to upload material, or their material does not yet exist in electronic format. But by definition it is hard to know their reasons for silence; it is inherently ambiguous.

Ninety-eight percent lurking may seem like a highly skewed distribution, but Internet research suggests that such a proportion is not uncommon among social (i.e. participatory) websites. Most attract at least 90% lurkers or more, with at most 9% contributing only minimally or occasionally, and only 1% contributing regularly or heavily (Nonnecke, et al., 2004; Nielson, 2006). The proportions vary somewhat according to the size and purpose of a site, and according to the nature of the participants' relationships. Lurking tends to be higher when contributing requires more work (Benkler, 2006a). A website that encourages minor additions and editing of existing material, such as Wikipedia, has more participation than one that requires a contributor to write new material of longer length, such as Wikibooks (http://en.wikibooks.org). Lurking tends to be lower, on the other hand, at websites in which members already know each other from other settings, such as a common workplace or attendance together at a conference. Perhaps obviously, too, websites that fail to make newcomers feel welcome have lower participation rates, as do websites which are designed in confusing or difficult ways. Regardless of these differences, however, a high proportion of silent participants generally signifies neither failure nor success; instead it simply demonstrates that accessing information on the Internet is extremely easy, and in fact easier than contributing information. Whether organized as a wiki or not, a website requires little commitment on the part of the average visitor.

Characterizing EPIs as a Community

As pointed earlier in this article, evaluating the potential of technology for building community depends not only on evaluating the technology itself, but also on identifying the goals, needs, and skills of the community to be served. In the case of EPIs, what might those goals, needs, and skills be, for which the Internet might be able to help? Today's AERA symposium may be a step toward addressing this question. At the moment, however, detailed information about EPIs as a professional group is sparse. Virtually no reviews about teaching educational psychology have been attempted, even though such reviews would be relevant to the goals and needs of EPIs, especially as these are experienced by the EPIs themselves. A partial exception, though, is a review by Floden and Meniketti (2005) contained in a volume about teacher education edited by Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005). The authors' purpose was to compile studies about the teaching of foundation subjects generally (not just educational

psychology) in initial teacher education programs. Ironically, however, the most notable conclusion of this chapter was that "the research on the impact of foundations courses…is scant" (p. 284).

Occasionally journal articles about educational psychology have offered innovative ways of teaching this subject, but without direct attention to what EPIs themselves say that they need or how EPIs might communicate with each other. A special issue of *The Clearinghouse* about the relevance of educational psychology for teacher education, for example, contained articles describing ten innovative ways of teaching educational psychology (Hanich & Deemer, 2005), including one about using the Internet to teach the subject online (Verdi & Johnson, 2005). None of the articles focused on the professional identity or development of EPIs; all seemed to assume that instructors would be working alone, in geographic and/or psychological isolation from each other. Likewise, journals related to teacher education have occasionally published thought-pieces written by leaders in the field of educational psychology, who offer experiences or wisdom about the needs of "the" field and of its proper place in teacher education. Textbook author Anita Woolfolk, for example, published such a piece in *Teachers College Record* recently (Woolfolk, 2008). Her comments focused not on the needs of EPIs as such, but on how textbooks about educational psychology can contribute to initial teacher education. The reflections are certainly useful for understanding how textbooks can contribute to the teaching introductory educational psychology, but not for understanding how EPIs' view textbooks or think about other common features of teaching educational psychology. And the article did not discuss how, if at all, EPIs might support each other's development.

But clues about providing mutual support can be found in a few publications, even if the clues are still a bit speculative. Goodman and colleagues (2009), for example, performed an online survey of members of the Special Interest Group on Teaching Educational Psychology (or TEP-SIG), most of whom are instructors of introductory educational psychology. Much of the survey focused on the demographics of this group, but some of it is helpful in characterizing the goals and needs of EPIs. A large number of EPIs called attention, for example, to the institutional and program constraints on their teaching. These comments implied that they considered professional teamwork important: coordinating the content of educational psychology with other elements of teacher education was part of EPIs jobs. Many survey respondents also reported teaching both graduates and undergraduates, suggesting that supports need

to be provided for both types of teaching. And many respondents called attention to content areas which they taught and considered unique contributions to their teaching of educational psychology. All in all, teamwork, selection of content, coordination of content mattered to these EPIs. Presumably communicating about these matters with fellow EPIs must matter as well.

The responses to the survey are limited and their interpretation is speculative. Considering them together with the usage statistics from the *teachingedpsych* wiki, however, the existing information does suggest ideas about using the Internet to build community among EPIs. First, it appears that individual EPIs do in fact welcome some sort of communication links with other EPIs for the purpose of learning about each others' work. Second, to accomplish this purpose, the links should be decentralized or democratic at least to some extent, rather than governed by the wisdom of a single author or blogger. Third, the communications among EPIs should focus on all levels of teaching educational psychology, not on the undergraduate or graduate level alone. And fourth, communications should focus on content areas and teaching strategies identified as important by EPIs themselves.

These four ideas provide benchmarks for evaluating current initiatives meant to support the teaching of educational psychology. How well, for example, does the wiki *teachingedpsych* described in this article succeed? Assessed against the four ideas above, it does seem successful, but only partially. *Teachingedpsych* provides a channel for communicating among EPIs (good); the channel is organized democratically (good); and the wiki allows for focusing on specific content areas and teaching strategies (also good). On the other hand, it addresses only the teaching of undergraduates, while ignoring graduate-level teaching of educational psychology (not good). In addition, although a variety of EPIs were initially consulted about how to organize the wiki, its content areas were organized in the end primarily by one individual (not good), and the connections among areas and strategies need further development (also not good). *Teachingedpsych* has apparently made a respectably good start at promoting community among EPIs, but more work would make it better.

Ironically, the path to improving *teachingedpsych,* or any Internet-dependent initiative, may depend not only on technology, but also on making the most of the traditional, non-Internet modes of professional development: conducting research studies and attending conferences. Using the Internet to improve the teaching of educational psychology will succeed by the more traditional activities of surveying

and interviewing EPIs about their work, and surveying and interviewing students about their learning. It

will also succeed partly by the traditional activities of meeting fellow professionals face-to-face to share

experiences, problems, and solutions to the problems. The research and sharing can of course focus

partly on the potential uses of the Internet, not only to teach educational psychology but also to

communicate with fellow EPIs. But whatever the topics pursued, and by whatever means, they must

somehow address not only the teaching of educational psychology *per se,* but also the challenges of

sharing that knowledge and skills with fellow instructors. At a minimum it means finding answers to

questions like these:

> * How much is a wiki site like *teachingedpsych* visited by people who are actually EPIs? How
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> many visitors are <u>not</u> instructors of educational psychology, but relate to the subject in other ways
>
> (e.g. as authors, publishers, or students)?
>
> * How many visitors seek information to actually use, and how many seek it to "carry away" to
>
> groups or activities *not* directly related to teaching educational psychology?
>
> * Are visitors looking for material of a specific type or on a specific topic, and what might those
>
> topics be?
>
> * What would make visitors confident about contributing material to a site, rather than simply
>
> reading others' contributions? Once they are in fact confident, what would motivate them to do
>
> so?

Since the answers to these questions may be complex and multi-faceted, they may require sustained

attention on several fronts for extended periods of time. In principle, though, the information exists, and

once found and compiled, it can guide development of EPIs as a collegial community of professionals.

We can assume that EPIs already know a lot about what they want and can do as individuals. But we can

also assume that they need ways to learn what their fellow EPIs want and can do, and how their

colleagues' knowledge and help build the capacity of EPIs collectively.

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Table 1: **Categories of Materials at <u>teachingedpsych.wikispaces.com</u> and Definitions**

1. Class activities and demonstrations: what to do on the first day or the last day; critiquing assessment practices; discussing behavior management, human development, motivation, student diversity, perspectives/theories about learning

2. Course assignments: assignments about human development, behavior modification, lesson planning, critiquing media, critiquing assessment practices; narratives of teaching; interviewing children; autobiography and educational psychology; reflecting on reading assignments

3. Course syllabi or outlines: educational psychology; introductory psychology; developmental psychology

4. Classroom management: materials related either to orchestrating class activities, or to dealing with difficult or inappropriate student behavior

5. Human development: various types or domains of development--especially cognitive, psychosocial, moral

6. Motivation: materials related to motivating students

7. Thinking and cognition: information processing theory; language/cognition; social influence

8. Instructional design: ideas and links for lesson planning and course design

9. Special education: supporting students with disabilities; also useful for general instructional design

10. Assessment of K-12 learning: nature of good assessment practices; issues about assessment

11. Introduction to psychology: websites, etc. for other areas of teaching psychology

12. Teacher education: links to materials and advice about general issues about becoming a teacher

13. Theories of learning: behavioral theory; links to other viewpoints

14. Social relationships: peers; classroom community; grouping; etc.

15. Blogs, wikis, and discussion lists: several that are relevant to teaching educational psychology...

16. Introductory educational psychology textbooks: compilations in book form of information and/or teaching-related advice about educational psychology

17. Articles, chapters, and books: an assortment of reading material, mostly intended for students' direct use, but some intended for instructors to help with teaching educational psychology*.*

18. Multimedia: videos and feature-length films related to various topics about educational psychology

Table 2: **Usage Statistics for <u>teachingedpsych.wikispaces.com</u>, May 2008-January 2010**

Number of activities, materials, or links posted: about 400

Number of distinct web pages: 38

Number of times wiki has been edited: 438

Number of page views: >10,000

Number of unique visitors per month: about 400 (varies)

Most commonly viewed pages: "Class activities" (10% of total) and "Course assignments" (8%)

Number of contributors to wiki: 6